

On being the new kid on the block

VIRGINIA WINSHIP
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBER

Six months have passed since I drove in rather unceremonious attire (jeans) to the Office of the Town Clerk, where Ms. Ann Daigle administered the oath of office deeming me an elected official of the Commonwealth. Until that point, my biggest concern had been that I might not even get the chance to do what had become so important to my family and friends. What would I do with all the energy and desire if I didn't get elected. Suddenly, on election night, I was given the approval by the voters of Shrewsbury! And, there was hardly a chance to catch a breath before it started in earnest the following day.

So far, I have come to understand several realities of this role. First, you must be a disciplined reader as there is a wealth of material to review on many of the issues brought before us. Much of what we are asked to analyze is statistical in nature, and takes time and thought to grasp. There are also policy reviews with changes to be enacted, annual reports, school improvement reports, special reports, budget variance reports, etc. Thankfully, our district administrators and their staff are more than willing and quite able to effectively provide answers to the questions that I ask. There are also numerous articles and web sites to use as references, not to mention the more seasoned members of the School Committee itself.

Another interesting circumstance is that we attend an even larger number of meetings or events related to our role than I realized. I have had to ask favors of other parents more than once to transport my daughters from or to a school activity or sporting event, and they have been gracious to assist. Regretfully, I have missed a concert and a field hockey game or two, skipped a few meals with my family and gotten home after everyone else was asleep. They generally don't complain, they know that what I am doing supports them, their classmates and families in Shrewsbury. They know that I really care and they like that.

Winship, see page 7



PHOTO BY AMY O'LEARY

Virginia Winship

New SPED director

DAN CHAPARIAN
SHREWSBURY HIGH STUDENT

This year, Shrewsbury welcomes a brand new Director of Special Education Programs, Mr. Steven Dupuis. Mr. Dupuis brings with him a wealth of experience in education, including fifteen years as SPED Director with the Ashburnham/Westminster Regional School District, seven years as SPED Director with Northbridge Public Schools, and four years at Southbridge Public Schools. Overall, Mr. Dupuis brings over 30 years of Special Education experience to Shrewsbury's SPED program.

Mr. Dupuis holds a Bachelors and Masters Degree in Special Education and Administration from Fitchburg State College. When asked how receptive the town has been, Dupuis responded with, 'Outstanding.' Days spent with principals, two-day conferences, and what he estimates as hundreds of meetings have prepared him perfectly for his new position.

"There are challenges with a growing system," Dupuis stated, and went on to praise his very talented staff. The SPED program in Shrewsbury works with individuals from ages 3-22, in every school and with every disability.

Changes are already being implemented into the SPED system, as Dupuis said, "We've spent a lot of time setting up a more efficient process for processing individual educational plans."

As technology develops in our everyday world, Mr. Dupuis is proud to institute it into his everyday work. "We're using it at a phenomenal rate," Dupuis said. He went on to add that technology allows students to receive new opportunities to learn. Many of these chances would not be available without the specialties that technology is able to address. Dupuis himself uses it constantly, whether on his computer or cellular phone.

One concern that he has, along with many other people, is that of space. However, he has hopes for the future, and looks forward to the construction of the new high school. He has taken a visit to the new building, and could only describe it as 'Mind-blowingly

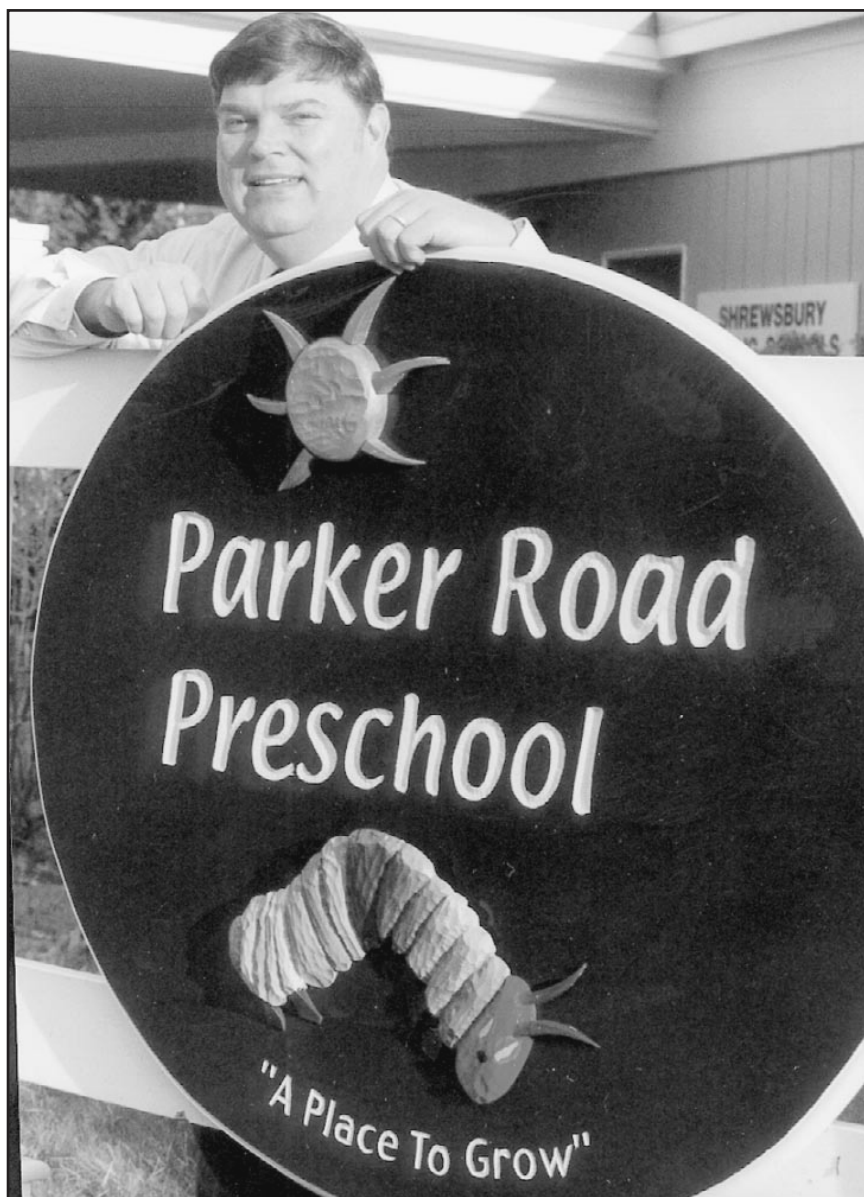


PHOTO BY DAWNA ALPHONSE

Steven Dupuis, Director of Special Education Programs stands in front of the High School carved sign inspired by Eric Carle's "Very Hungry Caterpillar."

beautiful.'

Aside from the space issue, Mr. Dupuis wants to help broaden communications between the school system and parents. He would also like to increase his staff. On top of that, with the ever-changing laws and regulations regarding Special Education, he would like to keep the staff as updated as possible on new developments in Special Education, in order to have them work up to their best ability.

As SPED director, Mr. Dupuis has no intentions of staying in his office the entire time. "I try every day to do something with the kids," he said. On the day of this interview, Dupuis had joined the three-year olds in their Thanksgiving feast. This is clearly

one of the advantages of working in such a close proximity with the students.

Mr. Dupuis also takes great pride in his work, citing numerous instances where he's remembered those cases that have touched him personally. "You can open doors of opportunity for kids having trouble," Dupuis said.

He also wants everybody to know that "My door is always open to staff and parents. I make a very strong attempt in meeting with anybody who wants to meet with me. The main part of an administration job is communication."

Undoubtedly, Mr. Dupuis will take that motto to heart throughout his duties as SPED Director in Shrewsbury.

One of life's certainties

SHARON M. YAGER
SHREWSBURY COUNCIL ON AGING

We've all heard that famous saying about "the two things we can be sure of in life"...people often joke about it, but for many senior citizens, its no laughing matter. The issue of taxes can be a hard one for seniors living on a fixed income.

Being in the "Generation X" category, I have had many of my contemporaries ask me, "What's the big deal with seniors getting all these breaks just because they're on a 'fixed income'?" I get a salary, so my income's "fixed" too and I don't get any breaks with my taxes. Plus, have you seen the portion that gets taken out of your salary for Social Security and Medicare? I'll probably never get the benefits and the seniors today are getting part of my paycheck. So what do they have to complain about?"

Well, Social Security and Medicare are issues in and of themselves and I don't think there is anyone who really looks forward to or is delighted by paying taxes, but we've all done it, and seniors did their share before us. Property tax is a 'biggie' for seniors because they are often living in a home that they have owned for many years and their home is now assessed at a value that has often more than quadrupled what they originally paid for it. For seniors living on just a fixed social security payment or a menial pension, increases in property tax can be a tremendous hardship. Fortunately, there are many programs in place that make staying in ones home and community as they age affordable.

Commonwealth Secretary William Galvin put out a booklet for seniors in February of this year to outline the latest changes that have taken

place in Massachusetts' tax laws in the last two years. Although there are exemptions clauses in the Massachusetts General Laws, many aspects to tax assistance eligibility varies by community. One of the most utilized exemptions comes under clauses 41, 41B and 41C. To be qualify, a senior must be 70 years or older (in some cases the age is 65 depending on ownership). Income eligibility varies between \$17,000 to \$40,000 for an individual to \$20,000 to \$45,000 for a married couple, depending on the clause, options outlined in the clause, how long the property has been owned and occupied and whether the property is owned solely or jointly. If qualified, a \$500 deduction is given on the property tax bill.

In some situations it makes sense for people 65 or older to get a

Life, see page 5